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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 THE HAGUE 000577

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)  
SUBJECT: GENERAL PETRAEUS STRAIGHT TALK TO DUTCH  
PARLIAMENTARIANS

REF: A. THE HAGUE 567  
[1](#)B. THE HAGUE 543  
[1](#)C. THE HAGUE 514  
[1](#)D. THE HAGUE 419  
[1](#)E. THE HAGUE 092

Classified By: Ambassador Fay Hartog Levin for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: General Petraeus, Commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), had a frank and open dialogue with select Dutch Members of Parliament (MPs) September 21. The MPs appreciated the unvarnished truth of General Petraeus in his assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. General Petraeus' depth of knowledge and commitment to success appeared to impress the Parliamentarians. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND:

[1](#)2. (S) Senior Dutch officials in the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs have encouraged the Embassy to approach MPs as the Dutch consider extending their military commitment in Afghanistan beyond 2010. Ambassador Levin hosted a meeting of five select MPs with General Petraeus for a frank dialogue on Afghanistan: Pieter van Geel, floorleader for the Christian Democrats (CDA); Alexander Pechtold, floorleader for the Democrats 66 (D66); Angelien Eijssink, defense spokesperson for the Labor Party (PvdA); Arend Jan Boekestijn, defense spokesperson for the Liberal Party (VVD); and Atzo Nicolai, foreign policy spokesperson for the VVD.

PETRAEUS PRESENTATION:

[1](#)2. (U) General Petraeus expressed his appreciation for the chance to meet with the MPs. He told them how proud he was to be the son of a Dutchman and of his meeting with relatives in the town of Amersfoort two days prior. He expressed his admiration of the Dutch commitment to keeping the memories alive of the "greatest generation" through their dedication to the memorials and commemoration events for World War II. He connected these events to his privilege of serving with Dutch soldiers in Bosnia, Haiti, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The general told the MPs that "your young men and women also deserve to be called the 'New Greatest Generation'."

[1](#)3. (C) In response to Ambassador Levin's request for his review of the current situation, General Petraeus began a very candid assessment of the challenges the Allies face.

Violence is up 60% due in large part to the Taliban slowly regaining strength and reestablishing leadership structure and sanctuary. Some of the violence can also be attributed to the coalition forces being more offensive. The Taliban are not supported by the people in large part due to their record from when they were in power. General Petraeus emphasized that our efforts have to "secure the people, first and foremost, and then we must serve the people." We must respect traditional tribal structures and reintegrate reconcilables. There is an "industrial strength insurgency," and it will take a solid, systematic plan to deal with it. General McChrystal's plan is in line with President Obama's strategy and McChrystal's resource options will be forwarded to the President in the future.

QUESTIONS FROM MPS:

14. (C) Boekestijn expressed admiration for General Petraeus's work in Iraq and appreciation for his frank assessment. Petraeus responded that it is his duty to be honest and straightforward. Boekestijn expressed his unease at the prospect of Karzai being declared the winner -- there will be many unhappy people and a question of "where is the government?" General Petraeus explained the lack of clarity on the declaration of a winner at this point, adding there could be a second round of balloting. He told of his personal knowledge of Karzai and his hope Karzai comes to embrace some of the same qualities Prime Minister Maliki adopted as he evolved into a leader. Karzai knows he has been damaged by the election issues and is very much aware that he

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is under the microscope. The international community has to deliver the message of the importance of integrity and power-sharing.

15. (C) Boekestijn also asked about the real impact of limited numbers of Dutch troops overall and stressed that corruption had to be dealt with. General Petraeus responded that we have to work through local structures and use local leadership. In an effective "whole of government approach," we will be able to capitalize on improved security. He used a chart to display all of the factors impacting governance and security and the complexity of dealing with each one. He emphasized three ways to gain the initiative as adding Afghan forces, more local engagement, and additional coalition forces.

16. (C) Van Geel asked the General's opinion about NATO and the coalition. General Petraeus stressed the importance of the Dutch persona in NATO and his appreciation for their willingness to "punch above your weight class." He stated that the Dutch emphasis on international law, human rights, and development, as well as the high regard for Dutch forces are important factors for a strong NATO.

17. (C) Eijsink mused about the resurgence of the Taliban and asked the best way to explain to her neighbor how extending the Dutch commitment will be beneficial. General Petraeus said you have to have security or nothing is possible. He stated ten per cent of the districts have two-thirds of the violence and that is where we have been focusing our forces. We have many advantages but we must understand, respect and be ready to mitigate the Taliban's advantages: their knowledge of the area, religion and language, and their proceeds from illegal activity. General Petraeus suggested the officials should first remind their neighbors why we are there. Al Qaeda's intentions and actions against us have been clear and unending. We continue to track the connections between Europe and the U.S. within the plans of extremists -- the danger is real. Second, we should emphasize that we are making progress. He then elaborated on the success we have had throughout the Middle East and Africa in dealing with Al Qaeda and also on the challenges of Yemen,

Somalia, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¶8. (C) Pechtold asked about Pakistan, and General Petraeus said Pakistan is a key place, but one where its government has recognized the threat to its own existence and are doing the fighting themselves. When Petraeus noted that madrassas are a big problem Pechtold asked why. General Petraeus emphasized that they preach extremism, just as those in Europe preach it. He added that the links between the extremists in Europe and Afghanistan/Pakistan are real and dangerous. He stated the Pakistanis have now done good work and we must continue to work with them and assist with resources and advice.

9, (C) Nicolai asked about expectations for the future. General Petraeus pinned the future on resources. He advised that General McChrystal's request for resources will come next after the U.S. and NATO leadership have reviewed his initial assessment. A regional approach is best, and he is glad Ambassador Holbrooke is on the job to add to the U.S. commitment to the region. He reviewed the tactical gains in Helmand province and previewed the potential of Afghan forces that are now doing a lot of the fighting.

¶10. (C) Eijsink asked about the plan as a whole. General Petraeus explained the process for General McChrystal's plan and how it was also in response to NATO requests. He called the plan a very honest assessment of the situation with an approach needed to succeed. The plan was based upon what is needed to support an overall civil-military approach to achieve success. General Petraeus stated he believed it was his and General McChrystal's professional duty to provide the best possible advice, that was what they have done. The military must now respect the decisions of those policy makers who must weigh all the issues of political and economic needs with the proposed options. Eijsink asked how the plan relates to the Comprehensive Approach espoused by NATO. General Petraeus responded that the plan is in concert with the NATO approach.

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¶11. (C) Boekstijn asked for any good news from other countries. General Petraeus commended the efforts of the French to add more forces, especially in light of the political capital expended to rejoin NATO militarily. He also advised that both the Spanish and the Germans have increased forces. He praised the NATO forces overall for their commitment and dedication to the mission.

COMMENT:

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¶12. (S) It appeared the MPs appreciated the chance to speak directly with General Petraeus and had confidence in his assessment and recommendations. The Ambassador noted a visible change in Eijsink that seemed to indicate a growing respect throughout the meeting. The impact of the meeting on Dutch decision-making cannot be measured at this time. It was successful, as part of Embassy's strategy to get the Dutch to extend in Afghanistan post-2010, by promoting a sense of openness and connectivity with Dutch MPs. As they were leaving, the MPs expressed appreciation for the honesty of the U.S. military leadership and their confidence in General Petraeus to bring success to the mission. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) This is post assessment of the meeting. General Petraeus did not have an opportunity to clear prior to transmission.

LEVIN